



**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF RAISED BILL NO. 278**

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Good afternoon, my name is Amorette O'Brien and I am the Educational Consultant at the Family Support Center in Bridgeport, CT. One of my primary job responsibilities is to work with FWSN-Truancy referred clients to enhance their academic functioning, by increasing school performance, attendance, and at times, behavior.

We refer these clients to PASS-Promoting Adolescent Skills and Strengths, a ten week gender-specific educational group whose purpose is to teach basic and necessary life skills to apply to the immediate goal of improved school attendance and performance. Throughout his/her time in PASS, I am in constant contact with school personnel to assess any changes in client's school functioning. It is incredibly important that clients are able to immediately implement their new skills in an academic setting. The more practice clients receive in applying their knowledge from PASS to school, the more likely they will be successful in using it long-term. Clients who were referred in the spring, participated in a Life Skills program over the summer, but had to wait until the fall to put into practice their new skill set.

There is another reason why it is important for us to receive referrals as soon as possible: hope. It has been my experience that hope is essential for clients in order for them to initiate and sustain positive changes in behavior at school. Unfortunately, if we get a referral after a student has been absent for thirty or more days then it is unlikely they will be able to pass the rest of the year. Despite what clients think (which is usually that they will have a "clean start" in the new school year), this delay in learning and lack of connection to the school does not usually diminish come the fall. If anything, longer periods of time away of school will make it all the more difficult for students to return.

A third reason why I believe it is vital for schools to file a FWSN complaint after ten days is so guardians have an opportunity to work with school personnel on addressing this issue. If the FSC receives the referral earlier in the school year then I am able to work with the client's guardian on preparing for school meetings, establishing a school contact, and learning about his/her child's educational rights. However, the later in the year we receive the referral, the less time I have to work with, and support, the guardian in developing a new relationship with his/her child's school.

For the reasons I mentioned above, I believe this bill will help decrease the amount of repeat offenders, as students will be able to apply new skills immediately and therefore see results, and increase positive communication between home and school. I am also confident the school system will benefit from this bill as they will receive support from community providers earlier in the process. That said, I would like to thank the Legislative Committee for providing me with an opportunity to voice my support for this bill. Thank you.